

in fact  
I was no longer interested  
a couple of weeks later  
the bell rang  
I wasn't expecting anyone  
a gray haired guy came up the stairs  
full of false cheeriness  
I didn't like him  
he asked if he could sit down  
I listened to his pitch  
he asked me for some water  
a little annoyed that he had to ask for it  
he referred to writers as "scribblers"  
that was another turnoff  
I was only 22 at the time  
he probably thought  
that he could overwhelm me  
with his seniority  
but it was evident  
that he was no writer  
just a rather cranky salesman  
my decided lack of interest  
only made him press even harder  
he must've really needed a sale  
the contract was turned in my direction  
he had taken a pen with black ink  
& made a star  
over & over on the same spot  
it looked ugly & desperate  
I was supposed to sign on the line  
where he had inked in that star  
both his hands were across the table  
clenched in fists  
I didn't sign  
& he wasn't any happier  
the school later received  
some bad publicity  
& quietly disappeared  
that salesman probably  
scarred every member of his family  
for life

#### "FAMILY VALUES"

leave it to a politician  
to corrupt the language  
with a built-in abstraction  
what does it really mean?  
mom n pop n the kids  
sitting in front of the set  
watching 101 Dalmations?



I don't think so  
it's just a phrase  
like Warren Harding's  
"return to normalcy"  
the right emotion for the-right era  
aimed straight at your heart  
& about as meaningful  
as any other commercial message

#### FOR A FUNCTIONING BRAIN

I pick up a bookmark  
they're all over the place  
this one  
has some writing on the back in red ink  
there is no liberty without leisure  
no quotes around it  
damn  
did I say that?  
doesn't sound like me  
but shit  
the statement has merit  
wouldn't you say?

#### A FATHER & SON MOMENT

we came together on the subject of music  
he loved Duke Ellington  
Duke's son Mercer was mentioned  
my father quickly dismissed him as a nonentity  
I mentioned a fine standard  
that had been written by him  
Things Ain't What They Used To Be  
my father was unfamiliar with the tune  
& didn't want to know how it went

#### 4 AMERICAN CARS

being 18 & impulsive  
I gave the guy 90 bucks  
& drove the black '52 Buick off the lot  
later I remembered  
that the car didn't HAVE a display price  
just 2 zeroes on the windshield  
make your own offer  
the guy must've been happy with me  
that white '57 Fairlane was the best  
a real classic